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Hecklers, bomb threat cut ex-CIA chief's talk

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A bomb threat cut short a speech by former CIA director William Colby Wednesday night as he addressed about 1,500 bankers at the University of Wisconsin Memorial Union.

The bomb threat was the last of a series of disruptions of Colby's appearance before the bankers, who have gathered in Madison from across the country to attend graduate classes in banking.

Two people were arrested in disturbances made before the speech began and while it was in progress.

About 8 p.m. — 20 minutes into Colby's speech — someone called the concession stand in the Memorial Union.

Bomb in the Union

Debra Dietrich, a UW-Madison student working at the stand answered the phone and said the caller told her, "Listen carefully; there's a bomb planted in the Union Theater where Colby's speaking." The caller immediately hung up.

Ms. Dietrich, who said the caller was a man, notified UW police.

After a 20-minute search by police turned up nothing, the union was reopened.

Just as Colby was telling the bankers that secret military intelligence was necessary to identify the real threats of the world, he was given a scribbled note at the lectern.

"Do you want me to read this?" Colby calmly asked, and then turned to the microphone to announce that the building had to be cleared.

Before the bomb scare, and between the other disruptions, Colby, head of the CIA from 1973 to 1976, did get a chance to speak.

Emphasizing that the nature of American intelligence-gathering is changing, Colby said the country is moving back to recognizing the need for military intelligence.

Process of sobering

"We are in the process of sobering up after a great national binge," he said of the nation's attitude toward the CIA and intelligence gathering. He noted that during the 1970s, people attacked many CIA activities and questioned the need for a spy agency.

"There was a sensational bit of hysteria in the 1970s," he said. "We Americans tend to get excited about things," referring to congressional inquiries into CIA activities. "We (the CIA) frightened a lot of people."

He said there was a move to bring the CIA under American law — "a very novel idea in the world of intelligence. Many concluded it was impossible that intelligence be related to law."

Mistakes continue to be made, Colby said, but now there is a system of accountability within the American intelligence network.

"It's been brought under the constitutional system," he said, noting there are two congressional committees that oversee CIA operations.

With nuclear proliferation, accurate military intelligence is more important now than ever before, Colby said.

"Thanks to technology, great power is becoming available in very small packages. This is the world we do face, and this is the one we have to know.

"We've got to be serious about the kind of dangers in the world," he added. "We have to watch for a potential military challenge."

The evening started the same way it ended — mired in disruption. A group of about 15 sign-carrying picketers walked outside the union more than 30 minutes before Colby was scheduled to speak.

One marcher described the group as "just a loose-knit bunch," and said they wanted an equal opportunity to speak.

Marchers and bankers traded insults as the bankers made their way

into the union.

Bennett A. Masel, 27, of 722 Spruce St., was arrested for disorderly conduct. Marc J. Rosenthal, 27, of 117 Drake St., was arrested for a University of Wisconsin code violation, which university police said is similar to disorderly conduct.

When Colby was introduced inside the theater, two men who had slipped past university security forces checking people for weapons crawled out from behind the stage curtain, pointed at the speaker and shouted, "Murderer! Murderer!"

Both were quickly ushered out, and Colby, a bit startled, joked about the incident.

During Colby's speech, shouts from marchers outside filtered into the theater.

After the bomb scare, Colby seemed willing to talk to reporters, but authorities intervened. He immediately left for Washington, D.C., where he is an attorney.

Afterward, bankers, standing around outside the union, discussed the bomb threat and demonstrators, not what Colby said.

A number of bankers exchanged heated words with about a half dozen protesters.

Several people got into a shoving match when one banker, who identified himself only as being from New York, tried to tear up a poster of one of the marchers.

"Get a job!" another, banker jeered at a marcher, who responded, "I've got two jobs."

"Cut your hair, then," the banker retorted.

After about 20 minutes, the marchers left and the bankers began to disperse.